

# Arlington Historic District Commissions



## Design Guidelines for Local Historic Districts

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## **Arlington Historic District Commissions**

[www.arlingtonhistoricdistrict.com](http://www.arlingtonhistoricdistrict.com)

### **Commissioners (at time of approval):**

Nellie Aikenhead (At-Large)  
Marshall Audin (At-Large)  
David Baldwin (At Large)  
Charles Barry (At-Large)  
Michael Bush (Mt. Gilboa/Crescent Hill)  
Beth Cohen (Pleasant) Vice Chair  
Alison Frank Johnson (Jason/Gray)  
Stephen Makowka (Russell) Chairperson  
Beth Melofchik (Broadway)  
Carol S. Tee, (At-Large)  
John L. Worden III (At-Large) Secretary  
Vacant (Avon Place)  
Vacant (Central)

### **Contact:**

Carol Greeley, Executive Secretary  
Arlington Historic District Commissions  
c/o Department of Planning and Community Development  
Town Hall Annex - First Floor  
730 Massachusetts Avenue  
Arlington, MA 02476

781-316-3265

[ahdc@town.arlington.ma.us](mailto:ahdc@town.arlington.ma.us)

**Almost all construction work on the exterior faces of buildings and structures on a property located in a Historic District, including fences, requires review by the Historic District Commission and in many cases a building permit from the Building Department. Always check with the Commission and the Building Department before having exterior work performed on a property.**

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Application and Instructions .....Attachment A

## **I. Introduction**

Arlington is fortunate in having a wide array of historically and/or architecturally significant buildings and landscapes from the eighteenth to the first half of the twentieth centuries, including the properties clustered in the seven established Historic Districts. Although the properties in the various Historic Districts vary in age, style, and level of ornamentation, all reflect Arlington's rich history. The Historic District Commissions work with property owners to ensure that the Town's historic buildings will continue to tell us of our past, while meeting our present needs.

## **II. Background**

The Historic Districts Act, Massachusetts General Laws Chapter 40C, was created to protect and preserve the historic resources of the Commonwealth through a local review system that encourages and ensures compatible improvement and development. In general, local historic districts have three key purposes:

1. To preserve and protect the distinctive characteristics of buildings and places significant to the history of the Commonwealth and its cities and towns;
2. To maintain and improve the settings of those buildings and places; and
3. To assure that new construction is compatible with existing buildings and their historic relationship to other buildings in their vicinity.

Under Massachusetts General Laws Chapter 40C and Town Bylaws, Title VII, the Arlington Historic District Commissions are required to review the architectural appropriateness of most proposed exterior design changes, whether they be a minor alteration, new additions, or removal of trim or structures. Property owners in an Historic District are required to obtain a certificate from the Commission prior to starting any exterior work on buildings or structures. Please note that, by Town Bylaw, the building department cannot issue a building permit for exterior work or demolition without the necessary certificate from the Commission with jurisdiction over the Historic District in which the property is located. Anyone contemplating exterior work should contact the Commission; property owners are encouraged to present preliminary plans to individual Commissioners or at informal Commission hearings to better understand Commission requirements.

The Design Guidelines detailed in this document are, as their name implies, guidelines intended to encourage appropriate design by applicants and foster predictability in Commission actions. While the Commission has the authority, in its exercise of discretion, to permit applicants to depart from the Guidelines, applicants are encouraged to follow them to the greatest extent possible and should not expect that the Commission will permit applicants to depart from them in most circumstances. The Commission does not anticipate departing from certain of the Guidelines, such as the guidelines regarding artificial siding. Further, it should be understood that certain properties, and the specific features of certain properties, may have greater than usual architectural or historic significance.

### III. What Changes are Reviewed

All changes to the exterior of a building that are subject to public view, whether from a public way, a private way open to public travel, a park, or a body of water must be reviewed and approved by the Commission. Such changes include, but are not limited to, repairs, replacements and alterations to windows, doors, roofs, gutters, building materials, new construction, additions, fences, walls and changes in grade. For the purposes of determining visibility, existing and proposed wooden fences, trees, shrubbery and other landscaping features are deemed not to block sight lines from public view. If there is a question regarding visibility, the final determination will be made by the chair of the Commission or the chair's designee.

The Commission does not review paint colors and will issue a certificate of Non-Applicability (see below) for ordinary like-kind (exact duplicate) repairs and replacements.

While landscaping is generally not subject to review by the Commission, the following are subject to review and approval by the Commission: changes to grade, outside HVAC equipment (excluding window units), and yard structures, including, but not limited to, fences, swimming pools, play houses and pergolas, etc.

### IV. Certificate Process

Before beginning any work on an exterior element of a property or applying for a building permit, an owner of property in a local historic district must submit an application<sup>1</sup> to the Historic District Commission in order to obtain one of the following three certificates:

**Certificate of Non-Applicability.** If the Commission or its designee determines that the proposed work is (i) not subject to public view or (ii) is a like-kind replacement of existing conditions, then the Commission will issue a Certificate of Non-Applicability and the applicant may apply for a building permit.

**Certificate of Appropriateness.** If the Commission determines that the proposed work is not entitled to a Certificate of Non-Applicability and must, therefore, go to the Commission for a hearing, then the applicant will be required to obtain a Certificate of Appropriateness from the Commission for approved alterations, additions and new construction before obtaining a building permit. For extremely minor work, the Commission may give its tentative approval by issuing a "Ten Day Letter of Approval". If there are no objections from either abutters or Commissioners to the Ten Day Letter of Approval, the Commission will issue a Certificate of Appropriateness.

**Certificate of Hardship.** If the Commission determines that the proposed work is not entitled to a Certificate of Non-Applicability and must, therefore, go to the Commission for a hearing, then in certain rare cases the Commission may, in its sole discretion, issue a Certificate of Hardship if failure to approve the application would involve a substantial hardship, financial or otherwise, to the applicant and the proposed work will not result in a significant detriment to the local historic district.

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<sup>1</sup> Note that a blank application as well as application instructions are attached to the end of this document as Attachment A.

## V. Design Review Principles

When reviewing individual applications, the Commission will be guided by the following design principles, which have been adapted from the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties:

*A property shall be used for its historic purpose or be placed in a new use that requires minimal change to the defining characteristics of the building and its site and environment.*

*The historic character of a property should be retained and preserved. The removal of distinctive materials or alteration of features, spaces and spatial relationships that characterize a property should be avoided.*

*Changes to a property that have acquired historic significance in their own right should be retained and preserved.*

*Distinctive features, finishes, and construction techniques or examples of craftsmanship that characterize a property shall be preserved.*

*Deteriorated historic features shall be repaired rather than replaced. Where the severity of deterioration requires replacement of a distinctive feature, the new feature shall match the old in design, color, texture, and other visual qualities and, where possible, materials. Replacement of missing features should be substantiated by documentary, physical, or pictorial evidence.*

*New additions, exterior alterations or related new construction that destroy historic materials, features and spatial relationships that characterize the property should be avoided. New work should be differentiated from the old and should be compatible with the historic materials, features, size, scale, proportion and massing to protect the integrity of the property and its environment.*

*New additions and adjacent or related new construction which, if removed in the future, would impair the essential form and integrity of the historic property and its environment should be avoided.*

## VI. General Design Guidelines

Although the points listed in these General Guidelines are covered in greater detail in the Specific Design Guidelines that begin on the following page, nine general guidelines are listed here to highlight their importance:

*Ornamental and decorative detailing should not be removed.*

*Deteriorated ornamental, decorative and characteristic architectural features should be repaired, rather than replaced.*

*No artificial siding should be installed (except [where specific exemptions are provided](#) as noted below).*

*Wood windows should ordinarily be retained. In addition, metal casements with significant decorative elements should be retained, although “plain” metal casement windows may be replaced with architecturally equivalent substitutes.*

*There should be no new openings on visible façades, except to restore original or pre-existing openings.*

*Missing architectural features should be documented as authentic by photographic, physical, or historical evidence before they are reproduced.*

*Historic carriage barns and automobile garages should be preserved. New fences should not act as visual barriers.*

*Traditional building materials should be used (except where specific exemptions are provided as noted below).*

## **VII. Specific Design Guidelines**

### **A. Walls and Trim**

Trim and detailing should not be removed.

Replacement wood siding or shingles should replicate the materials, dimensions, detailing and patterns of the original.

Artificial siding, including, but not limited to, vinyl, aluminum, asphalt, and artificial brick and stone, should not be used.

Shutters and shutter hardware should be retained or replicated exactly-in-kind and, if originally operable, mounted to remain so. Shutters may be removed for exterior painting of buildings, provided that the owner shall give the Commission prior notice and written assurance that all shutters and shutter hardware will be promptly reinstalled.

Awnings may be allowed if appropriate for the style of the building. They must be fabricated of canvas.

For new construction within the Districts: In cases where required by the building code (e.g., fireproof construction of a new structure close to the lot lines), non-flammable siding material (e.g., Hardie plank) may be approved by specific exemption as granted by hearing of the Commission. In general, material choice should be sympathetic to nearby structures, and will be specifically called out in the Commission’s certificate. Where approved, non-flammable siding material shall be installed with a traditional reveal (spacing) and with the smooth side out.

### **B. Windows**

Windows are one of the most important decorative elements of a historic building. This means that the size, number and placement on the exterior wall, as well as, trim and sash details, such as casing, size, number of panes and type of window, are all of significance to the historic fabric of the District. In the case of a very simple building with little ornamentation, they might be the only distinguishing feature at all. Windows on historic properties were also designed to last the lifetime of the building and in New England were almost always intended to be combined with good storm windows to form a tight barrier against the cold. Arlington has many fine examples of properties with serviceable 150-200 year old windows.

Therefore, the Commission's preference is to retain the original fenestration whenever possible, thus existing windows should be repaired, not replaced. For houses of particular historical significance (due to age, style, owners, or events) this preference will generally not be waived. Missing weather-stripping, sash cords and/or window glazing are considered routine maintenance issues and not deterioration. A homeowner's desire to improve the energy efficiency of their house is not sufficient reason to replace the historic windows as there are many studies that have demonstrated that a properly maintained historic window combined with a good storm window will provide equal or better energy efficiency compared to a modern replacement window.

If an applicant believes and provides proof that an existing window cannot be repaired for whatever reason, the applicant's proposal for replacing window[s] will be reviewed on a window-by-window basis. Only replacement with exactly matching components (i.e., all wood, true divided lights, same configuration, non-insert, single pane, etc.) will be deemed a non-jurisdictional "replacement" under M.G.L. 40C Section 9.

In cases where use of replacement windows that do not meet these criteria is desired, it is the responsibility of the applicant to provide evidence that repair or replacement with matching components is not feasible, or that the existing windows are completely unsalvageable. At a minimum, the Commission typically requires that the applicant provide a written evaluation of the window conditions prepared by a firm or individual specializing in the restoration of wood windows. Additional evidence might include photographic documentation of any extreme deterioration of the window(s) and/or scheduling a site visit for a commissioner(s) to view the windows prior to a hearing.

If a new replacement window is proposed that does not meet the "replacement" criteria listed above, the new replacement window must replicate the materials and design of the existing window, including the casing, size, number of panes and type of window (e.g. double hung sashes, etc.). Additionally, a proposed new replacement window should meet the following specifications:

- Muntins should be permanently applied, no wider than 7/8" and should not be flat;
- Window should have dark-colored internal spacer bars;
- Sashes and frame should be constructed with solid wood materials;
- Window should not be clad with artificial materials such as vinyl, fiberglass or metal;
- Tinted glass should not be used;
- Any wood frames and sills should not be metal panned and the dimensions of window openings, jambs and sashes should not be changed.



The Commission encourages the repair/reconstruction of steel windows when they are original to the building. If such cannot be repaired or reconstructed, the Commission will consider windows of alternative materials that are designed to replicate exactly the appearance of the original steel windows.

Stained or leaded glass and decorative windows should be retained.

Storm windows are not reviewed by the Commission, provided that the installation of the storm windows does not alter the existing windows or frames.

Additional information about historic windows:

<http://www.preservationnation.org/issues/weatherization/windows/>

Link to Cambridge Historical Commission's Guidelines for Preservation and Replacement of Historic Wood Windows in Cambridge:

[http://www.cambridgema.gov/historic/windowguidelines\\_final.pdf](http://www.cambridgema.gov/historic/windowguidelines_final.pdf)

## **C. Doors, Stairs, Steps, Decks, and Porches (including sleeping porches)**

Existing doors and door openings, including transoms and sidelights, should be repaired, not replaced.

If an applicant concludes that an existing door cannot be repaired or is an inappropriate door, the proposed replacement door should be made of wood and, if glazed with muntin bars, have true divided lights.

Porches and entrance porticos, including ornamental details, should be retained. Open porches and porticos should not be enclosed or glazed.

Sleeping porches should be retained.

Porch and entry steps should be replicated in kind if original.

No steps, stairs, deck or porch structure should have exposed pressure-treated materials (PT lumber is appropriate a part of a concealed supporting framework only).

Steps, stairs, porch and deck materials should consist of fir, cedar, or mahogany.

Railing/baluster design and spacing should be historically appropriate and repairs to existing railings/balusters should maintain original proportions including height.

## **D. Masonry and Stucco**

Unpainted masonry should not be painted.

Sealants should not be applied to masonry, unless a sealant is necessary to prevent further deterioration. In all cases, the use of sealants is subject to review by the Commission.

Repointing masonry (sometimes referred to as tuck pointing) should be appropriate in terms of the type, color and aggregate of the mortar to be used and the width and profile of the joint. Joints should not be widened when cutting out old mortar. New mortar should be kept off the face of masonry.

Sandblasting should not be used to clean brick.

Variegated bricks should not be used, unless to match an existing condition.

Stucco should be repaired with a mixture that matches the original as closely as possible. Non-traditional resin-based stuccos should not be used.

For new installations within the Districts: brick and/or stone veneer may be used only with specific exemption as granted by hearing of the Commission. In cases where brick or stone veneer is proposed, material shall be specified to as closely as possible replicate traditionally laid full dimension brick or stone. In general, use of brick or stone veneer should be at a distance from lot lines and the public way and will require approval by the monitor of a full-scale mockup prior to installation.

## **E. Roofs**

Slate and terra cotta tile roofing should be repaired or replicated in kind, including color, decorative patterns and style as much as possible.

Rubber membrane roofing should not be used in visible locations.

The height and original pattern of decorative brickwork in chimneys should be maintained. All decorative metal, such as iron cresting, finials and weathervanes should be retained.

Roof top HVAC and other mechanical elements, including soundproofing elements, should be placed out of view.

Roof decks and enclosures should be unobtrusive.

Patterns and textures of asphalt roofs should not be changed.

Skylights preferably should be placed out of view. When visible, skylights should be minimized in terms of both number and size. In no case will a “bubble-type” skylight be approved.

## **F. Gutters**

In general, the Commissions prefer to replace like with like — wood gutters with wood. However, currently available (modern) wood material is generally unsuitable for gutters, and there have been numerous instances in recent years of currently available replacement wooden gutters failing much sooner than original materials. *At 2021 Town Meeting, a proposal to simplify the Commissions’ procedure for acceptance of fiberglass gutters was proposed and accepted, but the proposal will not take effect until approved by the State. Until approval from the State is complete*

(expected fall 2021), installation of fiberglass gutters requires a formal hearing by the Commission. Guidelines will be revised as soon as possible.

Copper may be used as a replacement for wood gutters where such gutters faithfully duplicate the molding profile of the original

Non-contributory existing structures (typically more modern in-fill construction dating from 1950 and later) shall be given greater latitude regarding the range of materials allowed. Plastic gutter systems will typically not be allowed in the Districts.

Gutter systems including downspouts should be painted to match the existing structure. Rarely, a homeowner may feel that none of the above should apply to his home. The Commission strongly opposes making arbitrary exceptions to this guideline, but will listen to well-prepared arguments.

Lastly, a building in a historic district on which the gutters are currently aluminum (pre-establishment of District) may replace like with like. The Commission notes, however, that they prefer the gutters be replaced with material that reflects what would have been present when the structure was first built. In case of additions or significant renovation, the Commission may require new gutters to be historically appropriate (wood) rather than increasing the footprint of existing aluminum or plastic gutters.

## G. Signs

The By-Law governing signs in the historic districts (Title VII, Article 4, Section 4) is designed to provide that signage in the districts shall not be discordant with the architecture and historic aspects of the structures and streetscape. These rules are in addition to — and to some extent supersede — the Town's general sign by-laws (Title V, Article I).

There are three categories of signs, by size:

1. Small signs — under one square foot — one per building — no permit required
2. Large signs — between one square foot and twelve square feet — on premises used for non-residential purposes — no permit required if:
  - a. sign is of wood, with letter painted or carved
  - b. no symbols or trademarks
  - c. one sign per use
3. Other signs — permit required ***Criteria for Permitted Signs***
  - a. Signs and the posts that support them shall be of wood. In particular cases the Commission may permit a sign of wood-appearing composite but only when samples of the proposed material are approved in advance
  - b. In no case will cladding or covering with metal, plastic, or any other such material be allowed
  - c. Lettering shall be painted or incised or carved without symbols or trademarks

### ***General Rules***

1. Only indirect illumination may be permitted by the Commission
2. No flashing, moving, or internally lit signs are allowed
3. Where a permit is required, applications shall be for a Certificate of Appropriateness, the same as for a structural change
4. If a permit is also required for zoning purposes, application shall first be made to the relevant Historic District Commission as required by law

### ***Temporary Signs***

Temporary signs generally do not require permits but are, pursuant to the By-Law (Article 4, Section 3. A), subject to “such conditions as duration of use, location, lighting, material, and similar matters as the Commission may reasonably specify.” Examples are “for sale” signs, “for rent” signs, and signs of tradesmen such as painters, roofers, contractors, and the like. Such signs must be located on the property-owner’s premises and not on the public property (tree strip) between the sidewalk and the curb or street edge. Signs affixed to buildings must be attached or suspended in a manner that does not damage the building.

In general, a sign will be considered “temporary” if it is to remain in place less than 30 days, subject to the following exceptions:

1. for sale — from the date of listing until 5 business days after the closing
  2. tradesmen’s — for the duration of the work being done, but not more than 90 days
  3. political — from the last day for filing papers until the day after the election.
- Otherwise, a permit regarding duration should be requested of the Commission.

## **H. Fences**

Iron fences, and original ornate wooden fences should be maintained.

The Historic District Commissions have jurisdiction to regulate fences fronting the street, including all fences, or portions thereof, that are forward of the front facade of a building, with corner lots having two “front” elevations. To erect such a fence, you must obtain a certificate.

Backyard fences are not subject to review, and will be granted certificates of non-applicability. However, in accord with the historic nature of the neighborhoods, we encourage such fences to be of a traditional style, e.g., flat boards on stringers, with a cap, and painted in a way that complements the house.

New fences should not prevent or restrict public views of buildings. Tall solid fences should not be constructed as noise or headlight barriers. The design of fences should be appropriate in scale and architectural style to the building, its site, and the surrounding properties.

Front yard fences, which are subject to review and must have a Certificate of Appropriateness to be erected, should not obscure the view of the house from the street. New front fences and the front yard portion of side fences should be open in character so as not to create visual barriers. Even though such fences were not historically found in Arlington, they will be allowed where stylistically appropriate. Examples include wrought iron (including aluminum imitation wrought iron), picket fences, and specially designed wooden fences. Metal fences should be historically

appropriate in design, materials, construction and assembly to the original period of the house. We have some reference materials available.

The location of fences is also important. A fence in the front yard should be adjacent to the sidewalk, with similar structures (if desired) extending back along the sidelines of the property. When an application is filed to erect a fence, the application must include a plot plan of the property showing the proposed location precisely. Where privacy is an issue, we suggest a “living” fence or hedge. Plantings are not subject to review by the Commissions.

The following should not be used: (i) plastic fences, (ii) chain link fences, (iii) split rail fences, (iv) stockade fences, (v) lattice fences, except as a side or rear yard garden element.

## **I. Planters and Raised Beds**

When located in front yards, raised beds are subject to the jurisdiction of the Commission and require a hearing. Height and width of the proposed structures are of particular concern, as is their proximity to public ways. If located forward of the street facing façade(s) of the primary structure, they should not be more than 18 inches in height and should be sympathetic to the architecture.

Similar to the treatment of fences, planters and raised beds behind the street facing façade(s) of the primary structure are treated as non-jurisdictional and are eligible for a CONA.

Materials for planters and raised beds should generally meet the requirements for fences—wood or natural stone are preferred. The actual plantings in the beds are not within the jurisdiction of the Commission.

## **J. Walls**

Masonry walls should be maintained.

New walls should not prevent or restrict public views of buildings. Tall walls should not be constructed as noise or headlight barriers. The design of walls should be appropriate in scale and architectural style to the building, its site, and the surrounding properties.

Brick walls should use historically appropriate brick. Bricks and mortar joints should be compatible in color, aggregate and joint profile with the building.

Stone walls may be dry laid or set in a mortar that is historically appropriate in color, aggregate and joint profile.

Brick and/or stone veneer will not generally be approved for use in walls near the streetscape; the exemption provided in section VII-D above generally applies to foundation walls or retaining walls where the veneer is well back from the street. Stone walls along the street-scape shall be made of natural stone or brick consistent with adjoining structures

## **K. Demolition**

Structures, including additions and outbuildings, should not be demolished.

## **L. New Construction and Additions**

The Commission will review all proposed alterations and additions to existing structures, and all new construction. Before each Historic District or enlargement was presented to Town Meeting and approved by a 2/3 vote, a printed report was provided to the Board of Selectmen and to Town Meeting Members. Before proposing new construction or a major addition, applicants should review the relevant report to become familiar with not only the property in question but the District as a whole. Copies of such reports can be found at Robbins Library, the Town Clerk's office, and the District Commissions' website. The alteration review process is covered in the preceding sections of the Guidelines. Additions and new construction will be discussed in detail in this section. The Commission will review all additions and new construction to see if the proposed construction meets the following characteristics.

### **General Principles**

Any proposed construction should be designed to respect the existing streetscape, including the historic relationship of buildings to the street and to other properties in the District. For example, lot topography, new site walls, building setbacks, spacing between buildings, floor area ratios, footprint area (or building coverage) ratios, and open spaces<sup>22</sup> should be maintained and proposed architecture should be sympathetic to existing conditions. Ultimately, the guiding principle of the Commission is to ensure that any new structures that are approved and built are harmoniously with, and respectful of, the special nature of the Historic District in which they have been placed.

### **Alterations and Additions**

Alterations and additions should be compatible with the character of the original building and any earlier additions or alterations in terms of size, massing, material, location and detail.

The original portion of the building and earlier additions should continue to be recognizable as separate from the addition by means of massing, articulation of setbacks, trim, and ornamental detail. Additions should be designed so that the primary elevations of the original building remain clearly delineated, and the original building is not rendered subordinate to or overwhelmed by the addition. For the purposes of these guidelines, a "substantial" addition is defined as a project that is at least ten percent or greater of the square footage of the footprint including porches and other covered spaces of the original building. However, smaller projects might be considered substantial at the discretion of the Commission.

### **New Buildings**

A distinguishing characteristic preserved in many of Arlington's historic districts is the presence of generous street setbacks, spacious side yards, and generally, a greater level of open and undeveloped or minimally developed space than in other parts of Arlington. It is precisely the nature and purpose of an historic district that it preserves important neighborhood features that have survived relatively intact from an earlier period in our history. These features should so remain for the benefit of the owners and future generations. Thus, while a "legal lot" meeting

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<sup>22</sup> The term "open space" herein means existing undeveloped and unbuilt upon areas within the Districts inclusive of entire lots or portions of lots surrounding existing structures. For example, many Districts featured homes with undeveloped or minimal developed abutting parcels for 'side yards', gardens or trees.

minimum square footage requirements may be developed in other parts of the Town, or a small house torn down to be replaced with a larger one, a different aesthetic applies in those areas which the Town has designed as historic districts.

Open space in the districts, including large lots with existing structures and existing separate undeveloped lots, although possibly qualifying under zoning as a “buildable lots” are in fact, part of the historic environment of a particular structure and the streetscape as a whole, adding not only ambiance but also economic value to the owner of the structure. The development of such lots will be considered only in very limited circumstances, i.e., where it would not be incongruous with or unduly obstructive of any historic buildings already located on the land, or the district as a whole. For example, new construction in an existing front yard would be unlikely to meet this test. New construction in a side yard or on an existing separate undeveloped lot might meet this test if (1) typical spacing of structures along the street can be maintained, (2) height is consistent with adjoining structures, (3) the size is representative of the typical neighboring structures (not the largest precedent), (4) proposed grade changes are compatible with the character of the neighboring lots, (5) the style of architecture conforms to the predominant style of existing historic buildings in the vicinity, (6) the footprint – particularly the width – of the new building is appropriate in size and scale to adjoining buildings, and (7) the existing open space is not deemed to be an integral feature of the existing structures’ historical setting.

To provide for the orderly review of any new construction projects and to avoid the unnecessary and potentially costly commitment of time and resources by the Applicant and the Commission, proposed construction of substantial<sup>33</sup> additions or new primary or secondary structures, shall be subject to a three-step evaluation by the relevant Commission:

1. First, the Commission shall consider whether development of the particular parcel of land is appropriate to the purposes of the historic district. Such conditions might include, but are not limited to, the ambiance contributed by the existing open space adjoining an existing structure to the as-built fabric of the district, the existence of a significant historical feature on the proposed site, or the potential that the proposed structure would visually block existing historical resources. In the case of new construction, consideration of Step 1 shall be continued at least to the second hearing date for the application. Thereafter and following all further discussion deemed necessary by the Commission, a motion to deny the application at Step 1, if any, may be considered by the Chair and voted upon. This waiting period will permit verification of all claims made for/against the appropriateness of development of this site.
2. If the Commission does not deny the application in Step 1 the scope of the Commission’s review shall then be broadened to include consideration of whether the size, massing, scale, height, and shape of the proposed building or structure is appropriate in relation to the land area upon which the building or structure is proposed to be situated and to other buildings and structures in the vicinity. In order to assist the Commission in making such determinations plot plans and elevations showing the proposed building(s) and surrounding structures may be required. In some circumstances, particularly in areas of uneven terrain, a three-dimensional topographic model may also be required. The Commission may impose

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<sup>3</sup> For the purposes of these guidelines, “substantial” shall include any addition with a lot coverage of more than 100 sq. ft. In addition, the Commission reserves the right to deem any other proposed addition substantial if it determines such treatment is warranted by particular circumstances.

dimensional and setback requirements in addition to those required by the Zoning By-law. For example, the Commission might require that the new construction meet the same front yard setback and side yard spacing or not exceed the size of the majority of the existing buildings in the vicinity.

3. Finally, if the Commission does not deny the application in Step 2, the scope of the Commission's review shall then be broadened to include consideration of the appropriateness of the particular architectural design details of the proposed structure. Be aware, that nothing shall prevent the Commission from considering modifications to the specific elements considered in previous steps, if such changes are deemed necessary in the context of the more detailed architectural review. In general, applicants are advised that, while new structures need not exactly replicate existing structures, new structures should be finished on the exterior with materials, composition, and architectural details that are consistent with the architectural style predominant in the vicinity. This includes individual features such as doors and windows, which should be compatible in proportion, size, shape, location, and pattern with similar features on other contributing structures in the district.

If, at the end of any of the three steps laid out above, any Commissioner shall determine that the proposal as set forth does not pass the criteria for that step, such Commissioner shall propose a motion to deny the application and such motion shall be voted on by the relevant Commission. If the motion to deny is approved, consideration of the project shall cease. If the motion to deny is defeated and no alternative motions are made, the Commission shall proceed with the consideration of the next step as described above. Note that failure to deny a particular project at any of the three steps or a decision to move forward to a subsequent step shall not constitute approval of any portion of the proposal, or waiver of the issues discussed in each respective step prior to a vote on the overall appropriateness of the proposal. As provided by the Town Bylaw and M.G.L. 40C, only an affirmative vote by at least four members of the relevant Commission, (after the application has been completely reviewed and the three-step process described above has been completed) shall constitute the basis for the issuance of a Certificate of Appropriateness.

Given the extensive scope of review for any new construction, Applicants are advised to start the process for approval of such proposals well in advance of anticipated construction start dates. It is not unusual for the Commission's review to extend over a number of hearings to allow for the full consideration of the issues raised and to allow the Applicant to revise proposals based on feedback received. Note that the Commission requires that Applicant are required to submit any additional materials and confirm attendance at next hearing at least two weeks prior to the meeting date. If the Applicant requires a continuance inside the two-week window, they must submit such request in writing. The requested continuance must be for cause and may be granted or denied at the discretion of the Commission from the relevant district. Furthermore, in the interests of timely resolution of proposed major changes, the Commission notes its expectation that any given application must come to some resolution within six months. Failure of the Applicant to approve extending a hearing when the three-step process has not been completed or when material questions or information requests remain outstanding shall cause the Commission to deny the proposal on procedural grounds. As a matter of policy, and in the interest of informed debate, the Commission attempts to distribute relevant materials to abutters and other interested parties as appropriate.



## **M. Solar Panels**

In recent years there has been increased interest in retrofitting various types of energy efficient features to older structures. This will provide guidelines on how best to approach the addition of solar panels and other radically new energy technology into historic structures.

As mandated by M.G.L. 40C, the Commission's preference is to retain the original appearance, character defining features and historic fabric whenever possible, while accommodating the need for solar access. Solar panels location requirements are generally dictated by sun exposure. On the smaller properties that are typical of Arlington, locating a large array of solar panels in the back yard or other location out of sight of a public right of way is often impossible.

Therefore, all solar panel installations must be considered on a case-by-case basis recognizing that the best option will depend on the characteristics of the property under consideration in context of the specific historic district. It is the responsibility of the applicant to provide evidence that the installation will not be detrimental to the historic fabric of the structure or the District. Additional evidence might include photographic and plan documentation of proposed location of panels and/or scheduling a site visit for a commissioner(s) to view the site prior to a hearing.

Some basic principles to guide the Commission's decision include the proposed type of installation in the order of preference for the preservation of the historic characteristics of the property:

1. Freestanding or Detached On-site
2. New Construction On-Site
3. Historic Accessory Structures
4. Primary Historic Resource (Secondary Elevations)
5. Primary Elevation of Primary Resource

Additional considerations include:

- Placement and design should not detract from the historic character of the site or destroy historic landscape materials. Consideration to the visibility of solar panels from neighboring properties should be taken, without infringing upon the required solar access.
- For most properties, locating solar panels on the primary facade is the least desirable option because it will have the greatest adverse effect on the property's character defining features.
- Solar panels should be installed on rear slopes or other locations not highly visible from the public right of way whenever possible. Panels should be installed flat and not alter the slope of the roof.
- Flat roof structures should have solar panels set back from the roof edge to minimize visibility

- Utilization of low-profile solar panels is recommended. Solar shingles laminates, glazing, or similar materials should not replace original or historic materials. Use of solar systems in windows or on walls, siding, and shutters should be avoided.
- Panels should be installed flat and not alter the slope of the roof. Installation of panels must be reversible and not damage to the historic integrity of the resource and district.
- Solar panels should be positioned behind existing architectural features such as parapets, dormers, and chimneys to limit their visibility.
- Use solar panels and mounting systems that are compatible in color to established roof materials. Mechanical equipment associated with the photovoltaic system should be treated to be as unobtrusive as possible.

**Not recommended for any reason:**

- Removal of historic roofing materials during the installation of solar panels.
- Removing or otherwise altering historic roof configuration – dormers, chimneys, or other features – to add solar panels.
- Any other installation procedure that will cause irreversible changes to historic features or materials.

Additional information about solar panels on historic structures:

<http://www.preservationnation.org/issues/sustainability/solar-panels/>  
<http://www.preservationnation.org/issues/sustainability/solar-panels/additionalresources/NAPC-Solar-Panel-Guidelines.pdf>  
[http://www.wbdg.org/resources/sustainable\\_hp.php](http://www.wbdg.org/resources/sustainable_hp.php)

## **VIII. Amendments and Severability**

The Commission reserves the right to amend these Guidelines.

If any part of these Guidelines is deemed to be invalid, illegal or unconstitutional, then that part shall be severed from the text, and the remaining sections of these Guidelines shall continue to be in full force and effect.



# Arlington Historic District Commissions

## Application for Certificate

(Read attached instructions  
before completing form)

For Commission Use Only:

Date Rec: \_\_\_\_\_

Hearing Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Certificate #: \_\_\_\_\_

Monitor: \_\_\_\_\_

### Certificate Requested:

- ☐ **Appropriateness** – for work described herein
- ☐ Minor project    ☐ Major Project    ☐ Demolition
- ☐ **Non-Applicability** – for the following reason(s):
- ☐ Not subject to public view
- ☐ Maintenance, repair, or replacement using same design and materials
- ☐ Proposed change specifically excluded from review under Bylaw

☐ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

- ☐ **Hardship** – financial or otherwise and does not conflict substantially with the intent and purposes of the Bylaw

### General Information:

Property Address \_\_\_\_\_ District \_\_\_\_\_

Owner(s) \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Owner's Phone (h) \_\_\_\_\_ (w) \_\_\_\_\_ (fax) \_\_\_\_\_

Owner's Address \_\_\_\_\_

Applicant (if not Owner) \_\_\_\_\_

Applicant's Phone (h) \_\_\_\_\_ (w) \_\_\_\_\_ (fax) \_\_\_\_\_

Applicant's Address \_\_\_\_\_

Applicant's Relationship to Owner \_\_\_\_\_

Contractor \_\_\_\_\_ Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Architect \_\_\_\_\_ Phone \_\_\_\_\_

**Dates of Anticipated Work:** Start \_\_\_\_\_ Completion \_\_\_\_\_

**Description of Proposed Work:** (attach additional pages as necessary) Please include a description of how the proposed work (if a change or addition) is historically and architecturally compatible with the building and the District as a whole.

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### Required Documentation Acknowledgement: (see attached instructions)

I acknowledge that I am required to provide supporting documentation, including the attached "Supporting Documents Checklist", by the deadlines indicated in the instructions. I understand that if such documents are not provided in a timely manner, this application will be considered to be incomplete and Commission action may be delayed.

**I have read the attached instructions and, to the best of my knowledge, the information contained in this application is accurate and complete. I also give permission for members of the AHDC to access the property for the purpose of reviewing this application and work done under any certificate issued to me.**

Owners Signature(s): \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Application Information and Instructions

### REVIEW DESIGN GUIDELINES AND CONTACT THE COMMISSION BEFORE YOU BEGIN ANY

**EXTERIOR WORK WITHIN AN HISTORIC DISTRICT:** Property owners in an Historic District are required to obtain a certificate from the Commission prior to starting any exterior work on buildings or structures. Applicants are encouraged to review the Commissions' Design Guidelines (available at the Commission website) prior to filing an application. Once an application is received, a formal public hearing will be scheduled to consider the application, public notice will be published, and abutters and interested parties will be notified. Please note that, by Town Bylaw, the building department cannot issue a building permit for exterior work or demolition without the necessary certificate from this Commission. Anyone contemplating exterior work should contact the Commission's Executive Secretary. Property owners are encouraged to present preliminary plans to individual Commissioners or at informal Commission hearings to better understand Commission requirements.

#### Types of Certificates:

***Certificate of Appropriateness*** – Required for exterior alterations and new construction that are subject to public view unless specifically exempted by the Bylaw.

**Minor Projects:** doors, windows, skylights, lighting fixtures, walls, fences, HVAC and electrical equipment, gutters, and other small additions or modifications.

**Major Projects:** new structures, additions, projections, solar panels, and significant modifications to exterior elevations or roofs.

**Demolition Projects:** removal of any existing structure or portion thereof in a Historic District.

***Certificate of Non-Applicability*** – Issued for matters that are specifically excluded from AHDC review.

***Certificate of Hardship*** – Issued when the denial of a Certificate would constitute a hardship, financial or otherwise, on the property owner and if the proposed work does not conflict substantially with the intent and purposes of the Bylaw. Approval of a Certificate of Hardship requires detailed documentation of specific hardship to an individual property owner.

**Required Documentation:** At a minimum, an application for a Certificate of Appropriateness or Hardship requires the documentation specifically listed on the attached "Supporting Documentation Checklist". A Certificate of Non-Applicability requires documentation of existing conditions and proposed changes. The Commission requires one set of the documentation (preferably electronic) by the deadlines described below and seven printed sets at the hearing (3 printed sets for minor projects). A copy of the signed checklist, with the appropriate boxes checked off, must be submitted with the documentation. An application will be deemed incomplete until the required documentation has been received and reviewed by the Commission. In an emergency, required documentation can be presented at the formal hearing, however, this may delay action on the application. Based on the complexity or unique nature of a particular project, the Commission may, as allowed by law, require additional information. Failure to provide sufficient documentation could delay approval or be cause for a negative determination.

**Application Deadlines:** The Commission typically meets on the fourth Thursday of each month (third Thursday in November and December) at the Whittemore-Robbins House, 670R Massachusetts Avenue (behind the Robbins Library). To allow for the publishing of legally required notices prior to individual hearings, Applications must be received approximately four weeks prior to the Commission hearing date. Specific deadlines for each hearing can be obtained from the Commission's Executive Secretary. All required documentation must be provided to the Commission for its review by the following deadlines:

**Minor Projects: 7 calendar days prior to scheduled hearing**

**Major Projects or Demolition: 14 calendar days prior to scheduled hearing**

In most cases, failure to meet these deadlines will delay scheduling of a formal hearing until the following month. Upon approval of an application at a formal hearing, a certificate will be issued approximately one week from the date of the hearing and a copy will be sent to the Building Inspector to allow issuance of a permit.

**Contact Information:** Additional information is available at: [arlingtonhistorichistoricdistrict.com](http://arlingtonhistorichistoricdistrict.com). Inquiries, applications, and supporting documentation should be directed to Carol Greeley, Executive Secretary, [ahdc@town.arlington.ma.us](mailto:ahdc@town.arlington.ma.us), (781) 316-3265, or c/o Dept of Planning and Community Development, Town Hall Annex - First Floor, 730 Massachusetts Ave., Arlington, MA 02476. Any additional questions can be addressed to the Commissions' Chair Stephen Makowka at [ahdcchair@town.arlington.ma.us](mailto:ahdcchair@town.arlington.ma.us).

**Certificate Application (Revised January 2016)**

# ARLINGTON HISTORIC DISTRICT APPLICATION

## Supporting Documentation Checklist

Property Address \_\_\_\_\_ District \_\_\_\_\_

Applicant's Name \_\_\_\_\_ Email \_\_\_\_\_

Applicant's Phone (Day) \_\_\_\_\_ (Mobile) \_\_\_\_\_

☐ **For Minor Projects or Certificate of Non-Applicability**

☐ **Drawings (11x17 max., with graphic scale, dimensioned, all materials identified) or marked up Photographs (8x10)**

Existing conditions of historic façade(s) to be modified; Show location of proposed work; Show proposed feature(s); Elevations showing proposed work and context; Drawing showing location of proposed work; Drawing showing the proposed feature(s); Site plan for site located equipment and features

☐ **Manufacturer's literature and specifications sheets describing the proposed feature(s)**

☐ **Description of how the proposed work is either compatible with the District or Non-Applicable**

☐ **For Major Projects**

☐ **Photographs (8x10)**

Existing conditions of historic structure to be modified (facades, roofs, neighboring buildings); Site; Neighborhood context; Historic precedents for proposed work

☐ **Drawings (11x17 max., with graphic scale, must show differentiated existing and proposed conditions, dimensions, and all materials identified)**

○ ***Plans***

Site (showing proposed structures, fences, walls, parking, HVAC equipment, electrical equipment, and relationship to adjacent roads, neighboring buildings); Each floor; Roof (showing valleys, hips, ridges, dormers, skylights, chimneys, vents, HVAC equipment, solar panels)

○ ***Elevations of building facades- identify:***

Foundation; Siding; Trim; Gutters; Downspouts; Shutters; Railings; Stairs; Windows; Doors; Roof materials; Roof pitch; Chimneys and vents; Masonry; Light fixtures; Solar panels; HVAC equipment; Electrical equipment; Fences; Signage;

○ ***Wall sections (especially showing projecting features such as bays, balconies, porches, additions)***

○ ***Relevant exterior detail drawings (architectural trim, eaves, doors, windows, caps, columns, vents, rail systems)***

○ ***Profile drawings (window and door elements, railings, balusters, stairs, shutters, roof trim, corner boards, casings, water tables, skirts, frieze boards, and all other trim)***

○ ***For projections, additions and new construction also include:***

Neighborhood lot plan- include footprint to lot area ratio as well as that of neighboring lots; Plot plan- existing building(s), setbacks, proposed new structures; Site section (show relationship to site topography, adjacent structures, major landscape features, roads)

☐ **Manufacturers' literature and specification sheets describing the proposed components**

☐ **Suggested Supporting Submittals: Model; Physical Samples**

☐ **Description of how the proposed work is compatible with the District.**

☐ **For Demolition**

☐ **Statement of current state of existing structure and reason for demolition**

☐ **Statement of the historic significance of the structure**

☐ **Site Documentation (including Plot plan; Photographs of existing conditions; List existing materials; Year built; Original architect)**

☐ **Other provided documentation not described above (please list on a separate attached sheet).**

Applicants Signature(s): \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_